

men who have no need for watches
men who have no need for shoes
those that dream of a new Madagascar
men who have learnt their lessons
under the truculent academy of the sun

THE PERFUME OF QUESTION MARKS

— for Simon Killen

What's important?
I'd say
water and truth,
that our pilots are sober.
Comfortable shoes
rather than a map,
and hope
a small sparrow of hope
rather than
arrival.

WALKING THE STREETS OF PARIS (DECEMBER 1985)

The sky is janitor rag grey
the sky stutters tiny mouths of rain
the shop windows are pregnant with Xmas.
The lorry drivers look like lorry drivers —
stubbled, cigarette nailed into mouth.
Their faces — a fist of frustration,
checkmated again as they always will be
by Paris's narrow streets.

In front of the Dulac Detective Agency
a man in plain street clothes passes
with a large unwrapped slab of meat tucked
up under his suit arm.
Simultaneously on the opposite side of the street,
arms swinging loosely, a woman carries her baby magnetized
against her chest via a half-zipped-up, tight leather
jacket ...
there seems to be a new wisdom on the steets.

At the Central Post Office I find it impossible
to buy a postal cheque for 250 francs payable
to the Consulate of the Central African Republic.
I walk past the Pig Foot restaurant
but it is too expensive for me.
It features above the awning
a neon pig holding a wine bottle and a glass of neon wine.
I enter a street I haven't walked down for 7 years

and find a cafe without any customers and have
two glasses of Arabic tea and a glass
of creme de menthe with lemonade.

At the corner of rue Berger and rue du Louvre
a tourist bus turns in front of me
the tourists stare out through the thick and tinted glass
like dulled aquarium fish,
they make the very buildings ill with their
air-conditioned fear.
They are gone as quickly as they came.
The churches clang iron sighs of relief.

I had planned a longer walk
but the sky commenced
another sermon of rain.
Back in my room,
lying back, hands triangled behind my head,
I thought, "What is Paris?"

It's a cigar
it's a tambourine
it's God and architects
being frivolous
it's a city where I have knelt —
feverish pilgrim
amongst
its nectars
and nicotines.

12 MILES SHORT OF MEXICO

I dry-skated 'round the room,
I smoked about a hectare.
I scratched down
all my thoughts on paper
but they all flew off to be mosquitoes ...
the case remained
an iron egg.

I went down to where
all the bathing suits are broken,
flicking silver.
The newsboy told me he'd never seen
so much lightning in a dress.

A hawk's beak between piano keys,
a weather vane in the collection box
and a pair of wide awake shoes
were the only clues around.